

Mulch

Question: Is it safe to use the mulch from the green waste site? You have heard that there are Little Fire Ants at the dump (in Hilo) and you are concerned about bringing them home in your mulch.

Answer: We cannot say for certain that the mulch from the green waste site is free from LFA (or ground termites.) The area surrounding the green waste was sprayed to control LFA, but it is possible that ants are in the mulch itself since they are arboreal in habit and the mulch does not have time to heat up and destroy pests before it is hauled away by home gardeners and commercial haulers. It is wonderful material for the garden, but because it has not had time to age, we cannot promise that it is pest and disease free.

If you do bring a load of mulch home from the dump, we recommend that you unload it in a quarantined area and test for LFA first. Spread a little peanut butter on the end of chop sticks and place here and there in the mulch. Check on the sticks in an hour or two for presence of LFA. If the mulch is infested, you will want to treat it before spreading around your garden.

Information: See Cas Vandervoude's website www.littlefireants.com under "LFA-FAQ" or "Information sheets" for everything you need to know about LFA.

See CTAHR – pubs – Stop the Little Fire Ant at <http://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/oc/freepubs/pdf/IP-LFA.pdf>

See CTAHR – pubs – Identify the Little Fire Ant at <http://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/oc/freepubs/pdf/IP-16.pdf>

See also HDOA – new pest advisories at <http://hawaii.gov/hdoa/pi/ppc/npa-1/npa99-02-lfireant.pdf>

(The presence of red ants on the chop sticks after an hour may or may not mean LFA infestation. Other species of red ants are attracted to peanut butter; check size specifications carefully as well as other details to help you identify the ants accurately. If you need help identifying the ants, put specimens into a zip lock bag, seal it, and freeze them before bringing into the extension office.)